

COLCHESTER HOUSING NEEDS ANALYSIS

PUBLIC FORUM #1

January 4, 2005

The forum began with a presentation of the data analysis and findings by Sharon Murray, Burnt Rock Inc. and Michael Munson, project consultants. The presentation ended with a series of questions to stimulate audience participation. The following comments were offered:

1. Are there other housing needs that have not yet been identified?

- Options for senior housing, recognizing variations in affordability and needed levels of care/service. (It was noted that there was a waiting list of 90 for the 40 units of housing being planned by Holy Cross.)
- Moderately/reasonably priced apartments suitable for both entry level households and seniors.
- Co-housing/congregate housing.

2. What types of residential development should the town accommodate to meet identified housing needs?

- Moderate income housing suitable for such workers as teachers and others working in the town. (It is important to look at the needs of single and two income households.)
- Affordability is relative to income. A family of four has a higher median income than a family of two. Average household size is 2.5.
- Affordable starter homes in the range of \$150,000-\$160,000. The local market starts at \$200,000 for new construction.
- Smaller, low maintenance housing.

3. What issues or limitations should be considered with regard to new residential development?

- Allocations of affordable units—inclusionary zoning.
- Address regulatory barriers such as lot size, setbacks, and other use limitations.
- There is a shortage of lots—a self imposed scarcity due to regulatory limitations.
- The amount, type and location of new housing is directly impacted by the lack of public infrastructure—particularly waste water treatment. Public sewer is needed to support higher densities, and can be used to encourage desired growth patterns. The lack of municipal sewer service is already limiting attempts to create the growth centers at Exit 17 and Severence Corners.
- The Town's current development patterns reflect the lack of municipal sewer service. Colchester is the largest town in the state not having municipal sewer service.
- Consider the effect of the cost of infrastructure on the affordability of both new and existing dwellings.
- Work to allow off-site mitigation for use of prime agricultural soils.
- Consider providing incentive for affordable/moderate income housing such as density bonuses (e.g. Falmouth, MA, waivers of lot sizes, setbacks, etc).

- Consider revising density requirements for senior or congregate housing (see South Burlington or Williston).
- Consider allowing smaller lots.
- The price of land, combined with density limitations, makes housing very expensive.
- Regulations (stream setbacks, etc.) limit what can be done, and limits land available for development.
- The lack of public transportation may limit the ability to serve affordable housing.
- Rising interest rates will lower the price ceiling of what is affordable.
- When determining affordability, the cost of utilities should be included for owner occupants, as it is for renters. Utility costs are increasing and this will affect affordability.
- The market currently supports construction of high end dwellings.
- There is limited new rental housing being built in Colchester (although there seems to be a slight up-tick in rental construction elsewhere in the county).
- The permitting process, local and state, is too complex for small owner builders. As a result, most units are built by developers, and small lot owners are tempted to either not develop or sell land to developers.
- Will provision for smaller lots, etc., only create the opportunity to build more expensive homes?
- Don't equate density with affordability.
- Housing process may outpace the market. Who will be able to afford the high end homes? Some buyers come from out of state where home prices are even higher.
- Town should take charge of its own affairs, be proactive rather than reactive.
- Does the Town want to grow? If so, how much and at what rate? If new dwellings are asked to pay for needed infrastructure, will the dwellings be affordable?
- The town needs to know the real costs of growth. Are we willing to subsidize new development? Rising taxes make existing homes unaffordable.
- If we can't provide affordable housing, do we want our kids to live with us for the rest of our lives?
- Must increase supply to reduce costs. Demand is higher than supply at all levels.
- Check the amount of growth coming from out of state.
- The current Town Plan does not include a recommended growth rate. This should be defined and clarified.
- What is causing the decline in the number of mobile homes? Mobile homes are clearly a source of affordable housing.
- It was noted that many of our most densely developed areas are also those surrounding impaired waterways. If the Town wants to encourage density, it must also address effective stormwater management.